

The Sublime

Yesterday I did my famous walk behind the Philadelphia Museum of Art, along the River Trail, and stood atop the cliff, overlooking the beautiful tree canopy, the rushing river and waterfall, Fairmount Park's Greek-inspired architecture that sits just below the cliff. I gazed out toward the boathouses, and beyond the horizon—at this incredible storm cloud that was brewing in the sky. The light and shadow play in the sky during the stormy day is *sublime*.

What is sublime?

When I consider this notion of the sublime, I think about the emotional response a beautiful site gives me. There's an overwhelming feeling that flows through me when I feel the sensation of the sublime.

It's almost a feeling that makes you want to cry, or simply just evokes any sort of emotional response to you as a viewer of that beautiful thing.

The sublime is **beyond beauty**. For instance, I can put four corners around a beautiful flower, and say, "ha ha, yes, this is beautiful." But the sublime goes *beyond* this notion of beauty, where you find a deep sense of appreciation for that beautiful thing that resonates on an emotional level—beyond the simple visual pleasure of gazing at it.

And so, as I looked out towards the horizon on this very stormy day, standing on top of the cliff, I felt this overwhelming feeling of the sublime. There's this feeling you get through recognizing how connected we all are—from the smallest atoms in your body to the grandness of the universe and the stars above. That feeling flows through me when I stand at this location.

Transcend Beauty

I find street photography to be a very powerful medium, because it gives you a deep appreciation for the fleeting moments that are otherwise overlooked.

The photographer possesses the superpower to uplift the ordinary to an extraordinary height.

I believe great art has the power to transcend this world—to create a new world—through the medium. Our goal, our duty, is to **elevate the world around us** to a *transcendental* height—something that goes beyond this notion of beauty, inching toward the sublime.

The Unknown

It's the duty of the artist to embrace the unknown, to move forward into the chaos, and to put order to it.

When I stand on top of a cliff, looking out towards the stormy, beautiful sky, I'm standing in the face of the unknown, which can be a bit dangerous. However, by embracing danger—and openly inviting chaos—I believe we can achieve the sublime.

The sublime is something we can evoke visually through the aesthetic choices of black-and-white, crushing the shadows, exposing for the highlights, and invoking a sense of deep mystery within our frames.

Yes, I believe aesthetics are critical in the realm of art. Honestly, **everything is aesthetic**. The aesthetic of architecture can even evoke the sublime. I believe architecture is one of the highest forms of art, due to the way in which man transcends the laws of physics—striving upwards—*building*, despite the gravity that holds us down.

Yesterday, I also walked along the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, looking out towards the same stormy sky. And it's just an incredible sight to witness—those beautiful clouds from a high vantage point. But the **sheer existence** of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge itself evokes the sublime. It's an incredible work of architecture and engineering—a *symbol of man striving for excellence*.

It's the same feeling I get when I stand in the center of the Wanamaker building, looking up toward the high ceiling, listening to a beautiful piece of music from the world's largest playing pipe organ. Or standing inside the Sistine Chapel, looking up at Michelangelo's paintings—or *any* Roman Catholic Church for that matter.

This feeling overwhelms me. It gives you chills. It raises the hairs on your skin.

The Mundane is Sublime

When I walk through the mall, and I observe all of the commerce that's occurring—the infrastructure, the people sitting down, eating, walking, shopping, observing all the different pieces of clothing and goods being sold—there is something **sublime** about this *mundane* experience.

I think when you have a deep appreciation for the simple pleasures in life—like walking, observing, feeling the different surfaces beneath your feet, or the rain on your skin, or the warmth of the sun piercing through your eyes—these simple pleasures go *beyond* beauty.

They're sublime.

This **deep appreciation for life punches me in the gut.**

The most mundane situations—like waiting for the bus on a rainy day, or walking along the river in the spirit of play, simply following the sunlight, or spending time in a park—are enough for me to feel an emotional response to the world around me.

Maybe it's due to me having a more sensitive perception about things. I'm definitely much more right-brain, and I have a heightened sense of intuition. I believe through that intuition—*following it*—and photographing from your gut, you can evoke the sublime through the visual aesthetics of a photograph.

The sublime goes beyond beauty. The sublime goes beyond putting four corners around a moment and saying “yes.”

To evoke the sublime requires the photographer to have a deep appreciation for life—a deep presence in the moment—*reflecting back their soul* in the photograph they make.